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Satisfaction as a Mediator to the Relationships Between Destination Image and Loyalty

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Abstract: The study seeks to determine the mediating role of satisfaction on the relationship between image and loyalty. Tourist perception of Malaysia as a holiday destination is also ascertained. A conceptual model depicting the relationships among these constructs is proposed and empirically tested using structural equation modelling on survey data collected from European international tourists visiting Malaysia. The findings reveal that image has both direct and indirect effects on loyalty and uncover the mediating role of satisfaction. Malaysia was perceived as offering natural scenic beauty which offers an adventurous holiday with the chance to see wildlife and go swimming on beautiful beaches.

Key words: Structural Equation Modelling • Tourist Travel Experience • Post-Visit Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a multi-sector industry consisting of a collection of activities, services and industries that delivers a travel experience, as well as transportation, accommodations, eating and drinking businesses, retail shops, entertainment businesses, activities, facilities and other hospitality services offered for individuals or groups travelling away from home [1]. The importance of the sector is reflected through its significant roles in social, cultural and economic aspects as described by Cruz [2]. It creates positive social relationship among individuals. The sector connects the psychological and cultural distances that separate people of different races, colours, religions and stages of social and economic development thereby reducing the culture gaps and preventing prejudices and encouraging international understanding. Tourism activities establish social interaction between tourists and the host-community citizens based on the experience that tourism provides

and promotes exchanging of knowledge between them. Moreover, tourism permits the enriching of one's own culture through cultural diversity experienced during travel to the host country thus contributing to developing a mutual trust and respect for each other. Likewise, tourism promotes the preservation and development of the world's cultural heritage through preservation of historical sites and monuments. Globally, tourism contributes to the host country's economy through the earnings from foreign exchange besides providing employment opportunities and career development for millions of people in the world through retails, construction, manufacturing and telecommunication as well as directly in travel and tourism companies.

Malaysia is one of the most popular tourist destinations among the ASEAN countries. In the Asian region, it is ranked fifth (scoring 60 out of 100) after Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and China [3]. Perhaps the Malaysian tourism industry could achieve better a performance if not for its image problem. According to

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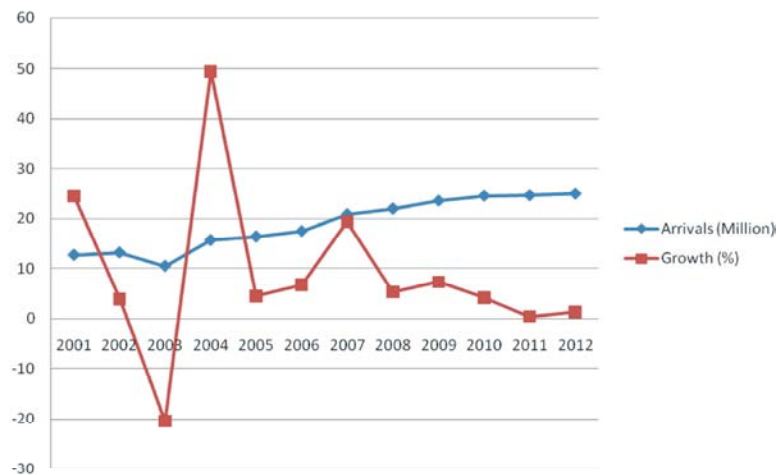


Fig. 1: Tourist Arrival and Its Growth Rate
Source: Tourism Malaysia: Fact and Figure, 2014 [10]

World Travel and Tourism Council [4] and Mintell [5], the main problem of the tourism industry in Malaysia is image. In the 70s, Malaysia's effort to position itself as 'A Tropical Paradise' failed to distinguish itself from the more established tourist destinations such as Hawaii and Bali [6]. In the nineties, since Malaysia is blessed with natural resources, it started to focus on nature tourism, adventure tourism and agrotourism to portray its image abroad using the slogan 'To Know Malaysia is to Love Malaysia' during Visit Malaysia Year 1990 campaign, domestically and internationally [7].

Due to the competitive landscape within the industry, in the mid nineties, Malaysia introduced 'A Shopping Paradise' slogan which positioned itself as a value-for-money destination in the effort to capture a different market segment [6]. Recently, a report by the Malaysia Tourism Industry Forecast 2012 suggests that Malaysia has a growing reputation as a shopping hub. Nevertheless, the theme 'Malaysia: Truly Asia' that was launched since 1999 has been capitalised on until today because it has become an identifiable image recognised by the international tourism community [8]. The tagline of 'Malaysia, Truly Asia' captures and defines the essence of the country's unique diversity of cultures, festivals, traditions and customs [9]. The Malaysian tourism industry has been tested by several challenges. For example, in 2003, the number of tourist arrivals was adversely affected, particularly by the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), as well as geopolitical uncertainties worldwide [8]. Despite these challenges, the Malaysia tourism outlook illustrated a positive growth except in year 2003. However, examining the growth rate of tourists' arrivals indicates that the

growth is unstable and in a declining pattern as illustrated in Figure 1 [10]. The unstable and declining rate of increase in tourists' arrivals supports the claim that the tourism industry is very competitive. In a situation where there are uncertainties within the environment and increasingly competitive international tourism industry, calls for carefully-planned strategies that would sustain the growth within the industry and continually contribute to the nation's economic growth.

The intensification of promotional activities has been undertaken to ensure that the Malaysian tourism industry continues to grow rapidly in the coming years. The target in the 10th Malaysia Plan is to improve Malaysia's position to be within the top ten in term of global receipts. In order to achieve this target, the focus is on increasing the number of tourist arrivals and receipts. To achieve this end, the bucket theory suggests that, instead of focusing so much on acquiring new customers, focus more on customer retention, which is achieved through satisfying and maintaining long-term relationship with customers [11]. Likewise, the understanding of tourists' perception of Malaysia as a travel destination would help the nation to formulate marketing strategies that sets it apart from the competing tourism destinations and position itself as a choice destination, meeting the requirements of the existing and potential tourist market segments.

Tourist satisfaction has become the central focus of destination management organisation and tourism related sector. Understanding tourist satisfaction is important because of its effect on the nation's future economy, since it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services and the decision to return [12]. In the case of travel-destination

management, travel satisfaction is crucial for a successful business [13, 14]. The study of tourist satisfaction is important to gain the market share as well as a primary source for future revenue growth [15]. Understanding tourist satisfaction would help to ascertain how well suppliers at a particular destination recognise and respond to the needs of its visitors and identify aspects of destination offering that require improvement [16]. The importance of securing customer satisfaction is further supported by empirical research findings, which suggest that satisfied tourists tend to communicate their positive experience to others and intend to make repeat purchases or return trips [13, 17, 18].

Tourism satisfaction is the emotional state of tourists after exposure to the opportunity or experience [19]. The Confirmation-disconfirmation theory defines customer satisfaction as a post-purchase evaluative judgement concerning a specific buying decision [20]. There are two approaches of measuring tourist satisfaction namely: (1). Single-item measures measuring the overall satisfaction using a single-item scale ranging from very unsatisfied to very satisfied [21-23]; and (2). Multiple item measures that measure tourist satisfactions with various dimensions contributing to overall satisfaction using a scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree [24, 17]. Dmitrovic *et al.* [16] claimed that satisfaction is usually measured through evaluating the characteristic of tourism offers because tourists may not be satisfied with the whole destination but satisfied with the individual attributes of the destination [25]. However, some choose to use both approaches such as Chi and Qu [26] that measured tourist satisfaction with attributes satisfaction and overall satisfaction.

The outcome of satisfaction with travel experiences is destination loyalty. Darnel and Johnson [27] suggest that understanding the determinants of tourist loyalty is an important phenomenon both at the management level and individual attractions. The degree of tourist loyalty is reflected through their intentions to revisit the destination and their willingness to disseminate positive word of mouth about the destination [18, 28]. The growing importance on destination loyalty within the travel and tourism studies is based on the desire to gain insights on traveller's retention, which has a direct impact on destination performance [26] and to measure the success of marketing strategy [29]. There is a paradigm shift in marketing that focuses on relationship marketing which emphasis on keeping and improving relationships with current customers rather than acquiring new customers. Also, it is reported that a 5% increase in customer retention can generate profit growth of 25-29% across a

range of industries [30]. A review of literatures suggests that customer loyalty is described as the customer's preference to purchase a product, services from an organisation consistently when the need arises to purchase [31]. Shoemaker and Lewis [32] define customer loyalty in the perspective of the hotel industry that suggests it is the likelihood of a customer returning to a hotel and that person's willingness to behave as a partner to the organisation. The customer as a partner is less likely to be lured by competitors and more likely to spend more with the same organisation over time Zeithaml, *et al.* [11]. Thus, destination loyalty can be described as the behavioural intention of the customers to revisit and disseminate positive word of mouth about a particular destination to others, as widely accepted in the marketing literature. The present study explores the influence exerted by the post-visit destination image of a destination on the future behaviour of tourists, whilst treating customer satisfaction as a mediating variable. Hence, the purposes of this study are, firstly, to construct a model that examines how destination image and tourist satisfaction affect destination loyalty. Secondly, is to examine the causal relationships among these constructs.

Conceptual Framework and Research Hypotheses:

The image of a destination is generally accepted as an individual's overall perception or total set of impressions of a place [33]. Specifically, the image of a destination is the sum of beliefs, attitudes and impressions that individuals or groups hold towards tourist destinations or aspect of destination [34-36] and is usually subjected to their travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, educational level and past experience. Buhalis, [37] postulates six dimension of destination, which are as follows: attractions (natural, man-made, artificial purpose-built, heritage, special events), accessibility (entire transportation system comprising routes, terminals and vehicles), amenities (accommodation and catering facilities, retailing, other tourists services), activities (all activities available at the destination and what consumers will do during their visits), ancillary services (services used by tourists such as banks, telecommunications, post, newsagent, hospitals, etc) and available packages. Chen and Tsai [38] posit that individuals having a favourable destination image would go through positive on-site experiences, which in turn leads to greater satisfaction levels and destination loyalty. Supporting the above work, Chi and Qu, [26] suggest that favourable destination image will result in higher tourist satisfaction level, which in turn influenced destination loyalty.

Baker and Crompton [19] argue that tourism satisfaction is the emotional state of tourists after exposure to the opportunity or experience or a post-purchase evaluative judgement [20]. Yu and Dean [39] posit that emotions might be a better predictor of behaviour than perceptual evaluation (destination image). In the tourism context, satisfaction simply refers to a tourist's evaluation of a destination based on their on-site experiences. Edvardsson *et al.* [40] defined customer loyalty as a customer's predisposition to repurchase from the same firm again, which in this case is travellers' predisposition to revisit. Kuenzel and Katsaris [40] described post-visit behaviour as intention to return (purchase intention/loyalty) and recommendation through word-of-mouth (WOM). Several studies [13, 15-18, 24, 26, 42, 43, 44] suggest that satisfaction is a good predictor of customer intention to revisit and recommend the destination to other people (destination loyalty). Moreover, Chi and Qu [26]; Tsung [45]; Mahadzirah *et al.* [18] and Kim *et al.* [17] advocate that satisfaction plays a significant mediating role in the behavioural model. Based on the above premise, this study proposes the research hypotheses set out below:

- H1:** The more favourable the destination image, the higher the loyalty.
- H2:** The more favourable the destination image, the higher the tourist satisfaction.
- H3:** The higher the tourist satisfaction, the more positive the loyalty.
- H4:** Tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination image and loyalty.

Methodology: This study adopts a causal research design using a cross-sectional sample survey. The research instrument was organised into four major parts. Part 1 of the questionnaire contains 25 items to measure destination image adapted from the work of Echtner and Ritchie [46] using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 7 as strongly agree. Part 2 of the questionnaire contains 17 items to measure traveller's satisfaction as proposed by Dmitrovic' *et al.* [16] using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as very unsatisfied to 7 as very satisfied. The third part of the questionnaire measures tourist loyalty using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as not at all likely to 7 as extremely likely adapted from Zeithaml *et al.* [47]. Finally, the last part of the questionnaire contains questions pertaining to the demographic data of respondents.

The construct of destination image was adapted from the work of Echtner and Ritchie [46], which consists of 72 items. However, after conducting a pilot study, there were only 31 items used for the actual survey. The respondents were asked according to their level of agreement toward every statement using a 7 - point Likert scale ranging from 1 as highly disagree to 7 as highly agree. In this study, tourist satisfaction is measured by seven dimensions which are environment, attraction, activities and events, dining, accessibility, accommodation and shopping. All the seven dimensions were adapted from the work of Chi [48]. The questionnaires measuring tourist satisfaction consists of 17 items using a 7 - point Likert scale ranging from 1 as highly unsatisfied to 7 as highly satisfied. However, after conducting a pilot test, only 9 items were retained for the actual survey and slight modifications were made on a few items in term of sentence structure and wording, for example "variety of shops" became "shopping outlets in Malaysia" in order to suit the current study setting and, most important, be well - suited with the target respondents. There are three approaches used to measure destination loyalty, namely behavioural approach, attitudinal approach and composite approach. However, the dimension of destination loyalty used in this study is composite approach. The purpose of choosing composite approach is because it captures and allows the best explanatory power of the construct [49]. Five items used to measure destination loyalty have been referred from the work of Zeithaml *et al.* [47]. A 7 - point Likert scale ranging from 1 as not at all likely to 7 as extremely likely was applied to measure destination loyalty. After conducting pilot study, all items were retained.

Data were collected using personal interviews at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) amongst European tourists. The collecting of data was conducted in the month of May 2009. The questionnaires were self-administered by the respondents. Confidence interval approach was used to determine the sample size [50]. Since accurate data pertaining to the size of this population was not available, the research engaged in creating a sampling frame as suggested by Burns and Bush [50]. Choosing every 10th element after a random start, a total number of 1000 questionnaires were distributed at the international departure halls and 842 questionnaires were obtained. A sampling frame was created based on the 842 returned questionnaires. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to select respondents using

“Random Sample of Cases”. From the created sampling frame, a total of 420 cases (representing approximately 50 percent of the population in the sampling frame) were selected for the study. After a data-cleaning process, a total of 312 cases were subjected to further analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 15.0 to ascertain the underlying dimensions of destination image and satisfaction. Using AMOS 7.0, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the multidimensionality of theoretical constructs and structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the goodness-of-fit of the hypothesised model and examine the relationships between each pairs of variables as suggested in the hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of the respondents were identified into an age group of between 20 - 36 (68%) years old and male tourists comprised the majority of respondents (63%). Most of the respondents interviewed (82%) indicated that the purpose of their visits to Malaysia were to spend their holidays, travelling either with their spouse or friends (60%). More than half of the respondents (58%) indicate that this was their first trip to Malaysia. They were discovered to be mostly from countries such as United Kingdom (38.3%), Netherlands (19%), Germany (12.3%), France (7.7%), Italy (3.4%) and Sweden (3.1%). Word-of-mouth from friends (42.5%) and relatives (7.7%), internet (18.3%) and tour agency (5.4%) emerged as the three key information sources for respondents to learn about the travel destination. CFA was conducted prior to testing the

SEM model in order to establish confidence in the measurement model specifying the posited relations of the observed variables to the underlying constructs [24]. The test was conducted because confirmatory measurement model should be evaluated and re-specified before measurement and structural equation models are examined simultaneously [13]. Each latent construct in the model was analysed separately and the CFA procedures run simultaneously for all the latent constructs (full measurement model). The measurement model should meet unidimensionality, validity and reliability requirements before testing the structural model [51]. Table 1 shows that factor loadings for each item were greater than 0.5 which is considered practically significance and are associated with their underlying construct [52], thereby fulfilling the unidimensionality assessment in the set of variables in the present study.

The reliability test was performed to assess the internal consistency of the three constructs in the hypothesised model and the value for alpha coefficient (α) greater than 0.7 is generally considered to be acceptable [52]. The table illustrates that α values varied from 0.78 – 0.85, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.7, thereby the measurement items gauged the constructs. Hair *et al.* [52] recommend using at least three fit indices with at least one from each category, namely absolute fit, incremental fit and parsimonious fit. The fitness of the measurement model was assessed using several common model fit indices, NCI (χ^2/df), GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, CFI and RMSEA [15, 51]. AGFI, GFI, NFI, TLI, CFI coefficient values of closer to 0.95 and RMSEA values of less than 0.5 indicating close fit with 0.08 represent reasonable errors of approximation in the population [53].

Table 1: Psychometric properties of the measurement model

Construct and Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Loyalty		0.85	0.89	0.73
Suggest Malaysia to friends and relatives as a vacation destination to visit (L2)	0.97			
Encourage friends and relatives to visit Malaysia (L3)	0.95			
Consider Malaysia as a choice to visit in the future (L4)	0.60			
Satisfaction		0.81	0.81	0.58
Sight -seeing in Malaysia (S7)	0.72			
Tourist destinations and attractions in Malaysia (S14)	0.81			
Scenes in Malaysia (S16)	0.75			
Image		0.78	0.80	0.51
A holiday in Malaysia is a real adventure (D20)	0.63			
Malaysia offers the chance to see wildlife (D38)	0.83			
Malaysia has nice beaches for swimming (D42)	0.61			
Malaysia offers a lot in terms of natural scenic beauty (D46)	0.75			

Note: CR=Composite Reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted

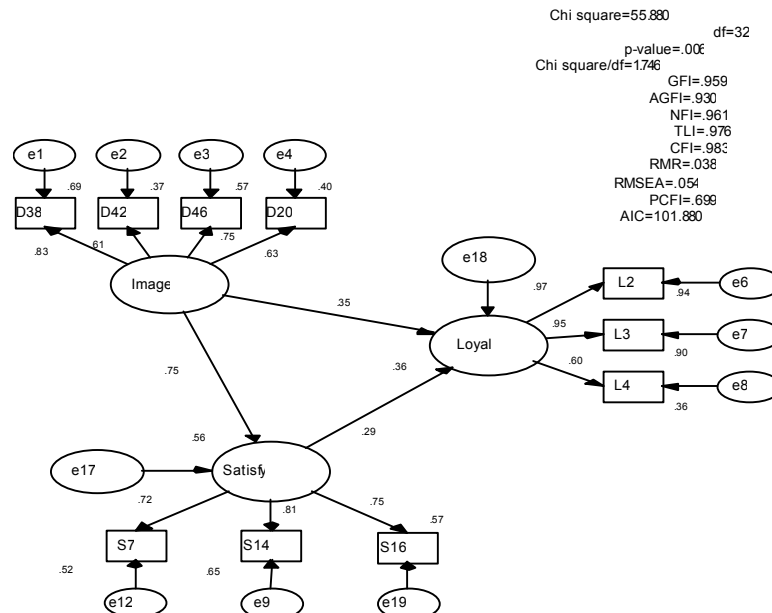


Fig. 2: Structural Model of Destination Image, Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty

Table 2: Goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement and structural model

Index	Level of acceptance	Measurement Model	Structural Model
Absolute fit:			
GFI	≥ 0.95	0.959	0.959
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.054	0.054
Incremental fit:			
AGFI	> 0.90	0.930	0.930
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.983	0.983
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.976	0.976
NFI	≥ 0.95	0.961	0.961
Parsimonious fit:			
NCI (χ^2 / df)	≤ 2.00	1.746	1.746

The criterion for acceptance for NCI (χ^2 / df) varies across researchers, ranging from as high as 5.0 (54) to as low as 2.0 [55]. Table 2 illustrates the level of acceptance values of these indices. The goodness-of-fit indices for both measurement and structural model exceeded their common acceptable levels, exhibiting the measurement of the hypothesised model adequately described the sample data.

Composite reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were used to test the measurement model's reliability and validity. Table 1 indicates that the calculated values of composited reliability (CR) ranging from 0.80 to 0.89 exceeded the critical value of 0.7 [52]. Convergent validity (AVE) was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE) and the scores are as indicated in Table 1, exhibiting values ranging from 0.51 to 0.73, surpassing the recommended level of 0.5 as suggested by Hair *et al.* [52], suggesting that the convergent validity of the measurement model is satisfied. The conservative

approach was used to establish discriminant validity by comparing the squared correlation between each pair of the constructs with the AVE [52]. The results show that all the constructs met this test, with none of the squared correlations surpassing the AVE. Therefore, the above tests supported that the measurement model has established adequate reliability and validity.

The structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method to examine the relationships between each pair of constructs. The fit indices of the structural model indicated that the model achieved adequate level of goodness-of-fit with NCI (χ^2 / df) = 1.746, GFI = 0.959, AGFI = 0.930, CFI = 0.983, TLI = 0.976, NFI = 0.961 and RMSEA = 0.054, suggesting that the study fits the sample data adequately well (Table 2).

The structural equation model as shown in Figure 2 illustrates the relationship among destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The path

Table 3: Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Satisfy	<---	Image	0.603	.061	9.886	***
Loyal	<---	Image	0.273	.086	3.155	.002
Loyal	<---	Satisfy	0.278	.107	2.604	.009

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

coefficients for the model as illustrated in Table 3 are positive and significant ($p < 0.01$). As expected, Destination image has impact on tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. Also, tourist satisfaction has positive impact on destination loyalty. The beta coefficient for the direct relationship between destination image and loyalty, excluding satisfaction from the model, is $\beta_1 = 0.56$. The findings in Figure 3 indicate that the standardised coefficient for the relationship between destination image and loyalty, with satisfaction as the mediating variable, is $\beta_2 = 0.35$. When the mediating variable (tourist satisfaction) is entered into the model, the value of the beta coefficient for the direct relationship between destination image and loyalty is expected to be reduced (51). In this case, $\beta_2 < \beta_1$ and the relationship between image and loyalty is significant at $p < 0.001$. The findings suggest that satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between destination image and destination loyalty.

DISCUSSION

The study empirically tested a model to examine the relationships between destination image, satisfaction and destination loyalty. The findings from this study indicate that destination image has positive impacts on satisfaction and loyalty. The study also provides tenable evidence that satisfaction plays an important role in governing the relationship between destination image and loyalty. This implies that the more favourable the image of Malaysia, the more likely tourists will choose Malaysia as their vacation destination. A positive evaluation of a destination deriving from positive travel experience would result in a positive image. In addition, destination image exercise a positive influence on satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction improves as the destination has favourable image and subsequently lead to greater likelihood to return to the same destination and spread positive word of mouth to others. The findings of this study contributed to understanding of the causal relationships among destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty which is argued to be lacking [26], especially in the Malaysian tourism context.

The major findings of this study also have significant managerial implications in order to achieve Malaysia's aspiration to improve its present international reputation within the tourism industry within the Asian region and become a developed country by year 2020. Over a period of time, from literature reviews, it is noted that Malaysia has been using several positioning strategies using different promotional taglines, from nature-based tourism destination through the campaign "To love Malaysia is to Know Malaysia", to culture-based tourism destination through "Malaysia Truly Asia" and recently value-for-money destination through "A Shopping Paradise" campaign to entice different tourist segments to Malaysia, which some argued has led to Malaysia facing an image problem. Therefore, the country's brand image should be established after conducting a thorough research from the perspectives of tourists to establish the differentiating and winning characteristics that are meaningful to the different target market since different market segments require different marketing strategies. Reaching different market segment with different positioning strategy is necessary. More emphasis should be given on the aspect of competitive positioning of Malaysia among its competing neighbouring countries. Malaysia was perceived by European international tourists as offering natural scenic beauty such as nice beaches for swimming, the opportunity to see wildlife in their natural habitat and coming to Malaysia was a real adventure. As such, Malaysia should capitalise on the competitive advantages of positioning itself as a nature-based tourism destination to this segment of tourists since the country is blessed with abundant natural resources. Also, in the positioning strategy, it is important to distinguish the country from its closest neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, that portrays as a county of "nightlife and entertainment" and recently "A kitchen of the world" [56] and Indonesia that focuses on culture as the destination image. Singapore would not become a potential face-to-face competitor to Malaysia's positioning based on nature since it lacks natural and scenic beauty [57].

Secondly, understanding the tourist's source of information is another crucial factor of attracting potential tourists to the destination. The study uncovers that the

majority of the foreign tourists acquire information before coming to Malaysia mostly from friends and relatives, followed by internet and travel agents. This reflects that incoming tourists prefer to depend more on personal sources of communication instead of mass communication. Therefore, efforts should be stepped-up to capitalise on the free promotional efforts by these satisfied tourists who provide endorsement based on their satisfactory experience travelling to Malaysia. This finding is parallel to the work of Abdul Kadir [58]. This source of information is powerful because it is perceived by tourists as credible and unbiased. Tourism Malaysia should capitalise using Buzz or Viral marketing that involves the use of real customers to spread positive word-of-mouth about the destination without being paid. In addition, the important role of websites should not be undermined during the era of revolution in communications and information technology. More efforts should be undertaken to run interactive online tourism promotions to entice tourists from a world away to make Malaysia's destination image accessible from distance and achieve the greatest possible benefits. In the designing of the online promotional campaign more attention should be paid on the design in term of capturing the needs of the target audience. Aspects of designing the tourism website that requires attentions are its attractiveness, adequate and accurate information, colours and images. Perhaps working on providing encouraging incentives to persuade tourists to visit the websites should be considered.

Much of the destination-image equity stems from the direct experience with the on-site experience. Satisfied customers would encourage relatives and friends to visit Malaysia and become the influential personal source of information about the destination. This reflects the importance of securing tourist satisfaction. In order to improve satisfaction with travel experience, destination managers must consider managing and sustaining the positive destination image meeting the specific tourist segment requirements. Different tourist segments may have different image perception. Thus it requires continuous efforts to sustain a positive image in the tourist's mind which may be even more difficult as other competing destinations are always approaching to capture the visitor market. Moreover, tourist satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between destination image and loyalty. Given the important role of tourist satisfaction, it is important to deliver tourism experience as promised through carefully-designed marketing communications such as advertising, direct marketing and

sales promotions. This suggests that managing image involves coordinating all the external communication vehicles that send appropriate and adequate information to potential tourists to make correct perceptions about the destination image. The image of a destination moulds tourist expectations before the actual visit. Tourist on-site satisfaction experience with respect to tourist destinations and attractions, scenes and sight-seeing appear to be crucial to influence tourist to suggest Malaysia to friends and relatives as a vacation destination and undertake to encourage friends and relatives to visit Malaysia. Interestingly, satisfaction with these aspects of on-site experience would make them consider making repeat visit to Malaysia. In this case, destination image and tourist satisfaction are extremely important aspects to be deliberated since the finding of the study discovered that the majority (58%) of the respondents indicated that this trip was their first trip to Malaysia. In the competitive marketplace of tourism, destination management organisation should put more effort on tourist retention whilst attracting new visitors through an effective marketing strategy.

The results of this study should be read in light of several limitations. First, this study was conducted using a cross-sectional descriptive research design that captured a "snapshot" of a population and was carried out in May 2009, thus findings were limited to this group of tourists. Future research should take into account the factor of seasonality because different groups of tourists travelling in different seasons may have different image perceptions. Secondly, the data collection was conducted among European tourists departing from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and LCCT which captures a certain group of tourists travelling to limited tourism destinations. Therefore, the result from the study should not be generalised beyond this population and replicating similar studies by collecting data from other Malaysia international airports is imperative to increase the generalisation of these findings. Thirdly, destination image and tourist satisfaction were studied as antecedents to destination loyalty. As indicated in the findings, these two factors explain about 40% of variations in destination loyalty. There might be other factors influencing and interacting with tourist's loyalty. Future research undertakings should take into consideration factors such as perceived value and service quality to refine and extend the model proposed in this study. Towards this end, future researchers should investigate the influence of destination image, service quality and perceived value on tourist satisfaction, which

in turn influence destination loyalty. Moreover, an examination of the direct influence of service quality and perceived value on destination loyalty would provide better understanding of the tourist behaviour intention. Lastly, this study does not address the psychological needs and wants of tourists, which are related to why people travel and what they want to enjoy. Future research should also incorporate motivation into the hypothetical model to gain more insights with respect to how individual are pushed into making travel decisions and how they are attracted by destination attributes. Ideally, taking into consideration the above recommendations, future research would give in-depth managerial implications to destination marketers.

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